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Viewing cable 05BANGKOK7242, PATTAYA: THAILAND'S EXTREME CITY

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05BANGKOK7242	2005-11-22 07:14	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Bangkok

Appears in these articles:

<http://facthai.wordpress.com/2011/06/14/wikileaks-thailand-4/>

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 BANGKOK 007242

SIPDIS

INFO ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMCONSUL AMSTERDAM

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

DIA WASHDC

HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI

USARPAC DCSLOG FT SHAFTER HI

NAVCRIMINVSERVRA SINGAPORE SN

NAVFOR UTAPAO COBRA GOLD

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/21/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: PATTAYA: THAILAND'S EXTREME CITY

REF: A. 1992 BANGKOK 41165

1B. 2004 BANGKOK 4819

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR SUSAN M. SUTTON FOR REASON 1.4(D)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The sea-side port city of Pattaya is one of Thailand's major tourist destinations, second only to Bangkok, and a significant contributor to the Thai economy. Attracted to the 'anything goes' reputation that centers around Pattaya's sleazy nightlife, over 4 million foreigners and 10 million Thais visit the area each year, making it a hotbed for vice, police corruption and transnational crime. As one of Thailand's major tourist spots, Pattaya could be a 'soft target' for terrorists, but local officials are taking steps to beef up security. With a sizable American ex-pat community living there year round, a primary port of call for U.S. Navy warships, and, unfortunately, the location of a significant number of non-natural Amcit deaths in Thailand, Pattaya remains a city of interest to Embassy Bangkok. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND: PATTAYA AND ITS SURREAL LURE

12. (SBU) Pattaya is located in the province of Chonburi, which is home to a significant amount of industry and abundant in natural resources. Pattaya itself was a sleepy fishing town until the 1960's, when it became a major R&R point for US forces during the Vietnam War. Pattaya soon earned a reputation for its raucous nightlife, and as the local economy boomed from the sudden influx of tourism, significant foreign and domestic investment followed. Today Chonburi is one of the wealthiest provinces in Thailand, thanks to the presence of international industry, a natural deep water port, and sizable Air Force and Naval bases.

13. (SBU) At the heart of Chonburi's economy is Pattaya. Nearly 4 million foreigners come to Pattaya each year, along with 10 million Thais. Just two hours away from Bangkok, Pattaya has the closest beaches to the capital, making it an easier excursion than the beaches in the South. Pattaya is inexpensive compared to other locations in Thailand. Pattaya also prides itself on offering something for everyone, whether the tourists are retired couples or families seeking all-ages entertainment. Despite Pattaya's attempts to market themselves with broad appeal, the vast majority of Pattaya's tourists are single men seeking an extreme nightlife. Although only 5% the size of Bangkok, Pattaya's red-light district is larger than all of Bangkok's major red-light districts combined.

TO LIVE AND DIE IN PATTAYA

14. (C) POLOFF spoke with several Thai officials based in Pattaya, to include the Mayor of Pattaya, the Police Chief of Pattaya, the President of Pattaya's Business and Tourist Administration, and the Member of Parliament (MP) representing the people in Pattaya, as well as one of our local American wardens and a local newspaper reporter. All of the Thai officials were unanimously proud of their close coordination between themselves and Thai immigration officials, and feel they have a very solid grasp on the numbers of foreigners who live in and visit Pattaya. Their latest figures show that between 300-400 Americans live in Pattaya year round, although our warden believes this figure doubles if you include people who spend significant periods of the year (3 months) there. The Police Chief commented that the Americans were the fourth largest group of ex-pats living in Pattaya, after the Germans, Japanese, and the English. According to newspaper reporter Somphon Yotthasak from the Thai Rath (one of Thailand's largest newspapers), Russians and Scandinavians are also moving to Pattaya in increasing numbers and buying up significant amounts of real estate. Whereas the Japanese living in the area work in the industrialized sectors, the Germans, Brits, and Americans that live in the area are either retired or involved in the service industry. Most of the Americans living in Pattaya are retired-many of them Vietnam Veterans who fell in love with Thailand during the war-but there are also many Amcits operating small businesses in Pattaya, which range anywhere from chartering scuba dives to managing go-go bars. Thai officials believe that native-Pattayans number under 100,000, but migrant workers, mainly from the poor Northeast (Isaan) region of Thailand swell the population to roughly 500,000. The mayor of Pattaya also commented that several thousand Thai Muslims live peacefully in Pattaya, and they often receive visitors from the volatile South without incident.

15. (C) Apart from being a retirement destination, Pattaya is the place people go to party. The Thai police estimate that roughly 100,000 Americans visit Pattaya each year, and DoD personnel assigned to Embassy Bangkok place the number of service members visiting Pattaya for a port call at up to 10,000 per year. The Thai police believe that the largest numbers of tourists are from Taiwan, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries. There is also much talk about the rise of Russians visiting Pattaya. Although only 50,000 Russians visit each year, they charter 100 flights a year directly from Moscow to Pattaya, and Thai officials estimate that their numbers are increasing by 15% a year (by comparison, most nationalities are increasing their visitors by 3-4% a year). The Russians and the Scandinavians come to escape the long winters at affordable prices. Other large groups of visitors include Indians (75,000 / year) and Middle-Easterners (70,000 / year), as well as increasing numbers from Korea and Vietnam.

16. (SBU) Embassy Bangkok's American Citizen Services (ACS) unit is intimately familiar with Pattaya. According to the ACS Chief, Thailand has one of the highest rates in the world of death by non-natural causes for Amcits. After Bangkok itself, most Amcit deaths in Thailand occur in Pattaya: this year 21 of the 106 non-natural Amcit deaths in Thailand have occurred there. The leading causes of death are traffic

accidents (usually involving alcohol), drug overdoses (ranging from laced cocaine to using Viagra without a prescription), suicides (from heartbroken loners) and homicides. An increasing number of crimes against U.S. service members are committed by transvestites. There are a number of arrests of Amcits each year, mostly involving immigration violations for overstaying their visas, but also a pedophile or two. Many American fugitives have taken up residence in Pattaya over the years, along with people who should be getting treatment for mental illness, but are not.

VICE CENTRAL: WHEN THE SOLUTION IS PART OF THE PROBLEM

17. (C) According to local police and politicians, the most common crimes in Pattaya are petty thefts committed by local youths. When it comes to safety for foreigners, there were universal concurrences from our warden, the Thai Rath reporter, and Thai officials that Pattaya is generally safe for tourists, and that all of the police elements are sincere in keeping things orderly. The one exception to this, however, is a big one: staying away from the 'dark businesses.' This reference to Pattaya's infamous nightlife centers around prostitution, which inevitably attracts drugs, extortion, the mafia, and possibly trafficking in persons. The Thai police claim they only arrest 30-35 people a month in Pattaya, with 4-5 of them being foreigners. Police claim that the most common crime committed by foreigners involves drunk and disorderly conduct, but that a few times a year they arrest a pedophile.

18. (C) Pattaya's night life lends itself to a significant amount of organized crime. At the forefront of crime in Pattaya is extortion, and at the forefront of the extortion racket are the police. With the exception of the Police themselves, all of the Thai officials acknowledged that police corruption is widespread, although the officials downplayed its impact upon business. Thai Rath reporter Somphon said that police make between 3000 baht (\$75 USD) and 10,000 baht (\$250 USD) a month from each establishment so that they can operate unimpeded, depending on the size of the establishment and the laws they are breaking. Nearly all of the bars involve some degree of facilitating prostitution, but the fee can also vary based on the legality of the business registration to how much after the 1 am closing times the bars stay open. The President of Pattaya's Business and Tourist Administration acknowledged these figures were accurate, albeit reluctantly. When asked to go into further detail, he hesitated and replied \"its not an easy thing for me to talk about.\" It's not hard to imagine why: on November 2nd, the editor of the local Pattaya Post newspaper was found dead in his BMW, shot in the back of the head. The editor had recently exposed local police involvement with prostitution, and had been working on a larger expose' on police extortion when he was killed by unknown assailants. Interestingly enough, Somphon claims that the police use some of their extortion money to fund their own operations, as they are not budgeted enough to do their jobs fully. The Pattaya City mayor disputes this claim, though he is likely on the receiving end of the process. Despite having four separate types of police units operating in Pattaya, the market is large enough for all of them to receive significant funds and for all of them to be satisfied with their intake.

19. (C) It is difficult to assess the true level of trans-national mafias in Pattaya due to conflicting statements from officials, inadequate evidence of crimes, and a difference in defining what organized crime actually is. Reporter Somphon and Chonburi-based Thai Rak Thai MP Sa-nnga Thanasanguanwong believe that organized crime exists from foreign elements, though even they disagree as to which countries they came from. Somphon believes the largest groups are German, Russian, and Scandinavian; MP Sa-nnga believes they are Korean, Dutch, and German, while a recent article in the newspaper The Nation also referenced mafias from Pakistan, Australia, and Canada. Conversely, the mayor and the police both say that there is virtually no trans-national crime at all. (Comment: neither our contacts nor any of the newspapers mentioned the presence of organized crime figures from the US. End Comment.) Part of the problem is simply defining whether or not crimes committed by foreigners can be classified as organized crime. According to the MP, the mayor, and the police, a lot of the ex-pat on ex-pat crimes are individual and personal, and not the work of larger criminal gangs. Many of the newly reported crimes include real-estate fraud, but that has been linked to individuals instead of organized criminal groups. Even reporter Somphon believes that violence among the ex-pats isn't about mafias competing for territory or business related, but a breakdown in relationships among friends. However, the November 7th killing of Dutch underworld figure John Mieremet is widely seen as a revenge killing for the murder of another Dutch underworld figure back in the Netherlands, causing police to rethink how Pattaya may be

linked with trans-national crime.

¶10. (C) The main businesses of the organized crimes are believed to be extortion and drugs. On the extortion side, ex-pat businessmen in the 'dark businesses' face a second level of payments to crime figures from their native countries, but not to anyone else. The drug problems involve ex-pat residents of Pattaya selling drugs, mainly ecstasy, to their visiting countrymen. The police are also closely watching the rise of Russian-speaking prostitutes appearing more openly in Pattaya. According to the police, most women enter Thailand legally on an entertainment visa, knowing full well that they will engage in prostitution and knowingly accept it; therefore the police do not believe this rises to the level of trafficking. All of the aforementioned parties believe that many organized crime figures on the run from their own countries hide out in Pattaya.

¶11. (C) In addition to the police and foreign criminal elements, it is worth mentioning that Thailand's most famous crime lord, Kamnan Poh, lives in Chonburi just a few miles away from Pattaya. Kamnan Poh has been a figure in politics and organized crime for decades, but was convicted of ordering the murder of a business rival last year (reftels). Currently free on bail while his case remains on appeal, reporter Somphon says that Kamnan Poh approves every construction contract in central Chonburi and receives a cut from each. As Kamnan Poh faces the prospect of spending the rest of his life in jail, Somphon warns that his removal from the picture will create a huge power vacuum among criminal elements that will extend far beyond Pattaya city. Three of Kamnan Poh's sons are active in the TRT; two of them are MP's. Chonburi MP Sa-nnga is a close friend and the personal attorney of Kamnan Poh, while the mayor of Pattaya is his protg.

A PRIME TERRORIST TARGET?

¶12. (C) As one of Thailand's major tourism sites, Pattaya could provide a very ripe 'soft' target for any terrorist attack. Pattaya shares many of the same characteristics as Bali. There is the large number of foreigners, including many from the Middle East and other areas of concern, making it easy for would-be terrorists to blend into the crowds. During the high season, the streets are overflowing with pedestrians, creating an environment vulnerable to attacks on innocent civilians. The large foreign tourist presence and Pattaya's reputation for being a 'city of sin' add to its attractiveness as a target by religious fanatics.

¶13. (C) Thai officials contend that other factors make Pattaya an unlikely target for terrorists. They believe that the violence from the three southern, ethnic Malay/Muslim-majority provinces will be contained in the south and will not bleed over to Pattaya. They also point out that Pattaya has been a safe place for members of terror groups traveling in the region to shelter temporarily, and they believe that terror groups would not want to jeopardize this satisfactory arrangement by launching a terror attack there. But in any case, local officials have stepped up their security efforts. The Thai police work closely with immigration officials and locals to track foreigners living in Pattaya. The mayor claims that the police have trained hotel staffs and taxi drivers about watching for suspicious activities, and what to do should a bomb go off. The Royal Thai Navy has EOD teams that routinely patrol the harbor. Most recently, Pattaya has installed 85 closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras throughout the city, with 4 separate command centers to track activities around the clock. The Thai police mentioned they would like to work even more closely with American contacts at the Embassy, noting also that previous coordinations have gone well. (In July RSO Bangkok conducted document fraud training with the Pattaya Police. RSO Bangkok is also coordinating a similar training session with Thai immigration officials based in Pattaya.)

PATTAYA'S FUTURE

¶14. (SBU) The tsunami had an indirect and positive effect on Pattaya, as many tourists afraid to visit the South head to the beaches of Pattaya. The opening of Thailand's new Suvarnabhumi airport will also benefit Pattaya, as Thailand's largest international travel hub moves from a location on the opposite side of Bangkok to a location nearest to Pattaya. The president of Pattaya's Business and Tourist Administration says that Pattaya will add another 2000-3000 hotel rooms-an increase of 10% over current levels-in the next two years. Even at current levels, several officials believe that Pattaya can accommodate over 200,000 additional workers to meet the tourist demand.

115. (SBU) Comment. As Pattaya continues to grow, so will the numbers of American citizens that go there to work, play, retire, and die. So, too, will grow the amount of criminal activities and risks associated with visiting there, though the Thais appear to be making genuine efforts to combat most of this (with the exception of their own extortion of local businesses). Though Thailand will continue to place a high priority on the safety and security of Pattaya's residents and tourists, it will always remain vulnerable and a target to a potential attack, though none are foreseeable at this time. For certain, the nightlife and illicit activities in Pattaya are still in full swing, probably due to the crackdown on nightlife in Bangkok (and specifically shrewd enforcement of the 1 am closing time) and the increased numbers of foreigners visiting the city. End Comment.

BOYCE